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Report of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People

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Letter of transmittal

[6 October 200

Mr. Secretary-General,

I have the honour to enclose herewith the report of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People for submission to the General Assembly in accordance with paragraph 2 of its resolution 62/80 of 10 December 2007.

The report covers the period from 5 October 2007 to 6 October 2008.

Accept, Sir, the assurances of my highest consideration.

(*Signed*) Paul **Badji**
Chairman of the Committee on the Exercise of the
Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People

His Excellency Mr. Ban Ki-moon
Secretary-General of the United Nations
New York

Chapter I
Introduction

1. The Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People was established by the General Assembly by its resolution 3376 (XXX) of 10 November 1975, with the task of recommending a programme designed to enable the Palestinian people to exercise its inalienable rights, as recognized by the Assembly in its resolution 3236 (XXIX) of 22 November 1974.

2. The recommendations made by the Committee in its first report to the General Assembly[1] were endorsed by the Assembly as a basis for the solution of the question of Palestine. In its subsequent reports,[2] the Committee has continued to stress that a comprehensive, just and lasting solution to the question of Palestine, the core of the Arab-Israeli conflict, must be based on the relevant United Nations resolutions and the following essential principles: the withdrawal of Israel from the Palestinian territory occupied since 1967, including East Jerusalem, and from the other occupied Arab territories; respect for the right of all States in the region to live in peace within secure and internationally recognized boundaries; and the recognition and exercise of the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people. The recommendations of the Committee contained in its first report could not be implemented, and the Assembly each year renewed the Committee's mandate and requested it to intensify efforts in pursuit of its objectives.

3. Since 1991, the Committee has consistently supported the peace process. It welcomed the 1991 Madrid Peace Conference that launched the Middle East peace process based on Security Council resolutions 242 (1967) and 338 (1973). It also welcomed the Declaration of Principles on Interim Self-Government Arrangements (A/48/486-S/26560, annex) and subsequent implementation agreements. The Committee has strongly supported the vision of two States, Israel and Palestine, living side by side within secure and recognized borders on the basis of the 1949 armistice lines, in accordance with relevant United Nations resolutions, including Security Council resolutions 1397 (2002) and 1515 (2003). The Committee welcomed and supported the Quartet's road map and called on the parties to implement it. In keeping with its mandate, the Committee continued to work towards creating conditions that would allow the Palestinian people to realize its inalienable rights, including the right to self-determination and to its own independent State, on all of the Palestinian territory occupied in 1967, including East Jerusalem. The Committee also promotes support and assistance by the international community to the Palestinian people.

4. The reporting period was characterized by the dichotomy between the resumption of the Israeli-Palestinian political negotiations and intensified international engagement on the issue, and a deteriorating situation on the ground.

5. On 27 November 2007, representatives of more than 50 Governments and intergovernmental organizations met at a conference, spearheaded by the Quartet and convened by the United States of America, in Annapolis, Maryland, which led

[1] *Official Records of the General Assembly, Thirty-first Session, Supplement No. 35* (A/31/35).

[2] Since the thirty-first session, the Committee has submitted annual reports to the General Assembly; all such reports have been issued as supplement No. 35 of the sessional documentation of the Assembly.

to a resumption of permanent status negotiations between Israel and the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) with the declared goal of reaching a two-State solution. Israel and PLO also renewed their commitment to implementing their respective obligations under the road map. The conference marked a new level of involvement on the part of the international community, with major stakeholders from all regions supporting a rigorous timetable for the finalization of the negotiations between the parties. The Committee welcomed the outcome of the meeting and pledged to work towards creating a climate conducive to the advancement of the permanent status negotiations. The resumption of the negotiations was further bolstered by the Paris donors' conference held in December 2007, which resulted in substantial pledges towards the Palestinian Reform and Development Plan.

6. At the same time, throughout the reporting period, the Israeli army continued to conduct military operations in Palestinian population centres, causing the deaths of and injury to many Palestinian civilians. The actions of Israel included extrajudicial killings, house demolitions and arrests. The Gaza Strip remained sealed off by the occupying Power for the greater part of the year, with Israel allowing only the most basic supplies to pass through checkpoints to avoid a large-scale humanitarian catastrophe. The response by armed Palestinian groups included rocket and mortar fire, sniper shootings and a suicide attack within Israel, resulting in Israeli casualties, including among civilians.

7. The Palestinian Authority, pursuant to its road map obligations, continued to consolidate, reform and train its security services, deploying them in major West Bank cities. In June, through Egyptian mediation, a Gaza ceasefire was agreed that has been by and large observed by the parties. The calm resulting from the ceasefire has led to more frequent openings of Israeli checkpoints for the passage of goods. However, the ceasefire did not result in a significant improvement in the dire living conditions of the civilian population in Gaza.

8. The Government of Israel, in violation of international law, United Nations resolutions and its road map obligations, continued to expand Israeli settlements, including in and around East Jerusalem. The construction of the wall on Palestinian land also continued, in contravention of the advisory opinion of the International Court of Justice (see A/ES-10/273 and Corr.1). The number of military checkpoints throughout the West Bank exceeded 600, stifling Palestinian economic activity and further worsening the daily hardships experienced by the Palestinian population. The lack of tangible progress in the situation on the ground had a negative effect on the ongoing negotiations between the parties.

9. Through its activities, the Committee sought to support the momentum created at Annapolis towards the successful conclusion of the permanent settlement negotiations. The Committee warned repeatedly that without visible improvement in the situation in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip, the negotiations were doomed to fail and repeatedly reminded Israel, the occupying Power, of its obligations under international law. The Committee cautioned that the continuation of a policy of fait accompli on the ground posed a grave threat to the prospects for a peaceful, negotiated solution of the conflict. Moreover, it precludes any possibility of improving the economic and humanitarian situation and is making a two-State solution virtually impossible to achieve.

10. The Committee remained concerned about the internal Palestinian divisions blocking national reconciliation and the reunification of the West Bank and Gaza under the Palestinian Authority. It expressed support for all efforts of Arab and other countries, as well as the initiatives of the President of the Palestinian Authority, Mahmoud Abbas, aimed at restoring Palestinian national unity as a necessity on the path towards a permanent settlement of the question of Palestine.

11. At a meeting marking 60 years since the dispossession of the Palestinian people in the Nakba of 1948, the Chairman of the Committee, Paul Badji, urged the international community to live up to its responsibility to bring about a just solution of the question of Palestine. Support should be given to advancing the political process, bolstering it through real changes on the ground, thereby enabling the parties to make progress in negotiations on all the permanent status issues.

Chapter II
Mandate of the Committee

12. On 10 December 2007, the General Assembly renewed the mandate of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People (see resolution 62/80), requested the Secretary-General to continue to provide the Division for Palestinian Rights of the Secretariat with the necessary resources to carry out its programme of work (see resolution 62/81) and requested the continuation of the special information programme on the question of Palestine of the Department of Public Information of the Secretariat (see resolution 62/82). On the same date, the Assembly adopted resolution 62/83 entitled "Peaceful settlement of the question of Palestine".

Chapter III
Organization of work

A. Membership and officers

13. By General Assembly decision 62/553 of 11 September 2008, Nicaragua was appointed as a member of the Committee, increasing the membership to 23. The Committee is encouraged by this expression of growing support for its work. The Committee is accordingly composed of the following Member States: Afghanistan, Belarus, Cuba, Cyprus, Guinea, Guyana, India, Indonesia, the Lao People's Democratic Republic, Madagascar, Malaysia, Mali, Malta, Namibia, Nicaragua, Nigeria, Pakistan, Senegal, Sierra Leone, South Africa, Tunisia, Turkey and Ukraine.

14. At its 307th meeting, on 14 February 2008, the Committee re-elected Paul Badji (Senegal) as Chairman, Rodrigo Malmierca Díaz (Cuba) and Zahir Tanin (Afghanistan) as Vice-Chairmen and Saviour F. Borg (Malta) as Rapporteur.

15. Also at the 307th meeting, the Committee adopted its programme of work for 2008 (A/AC.183/2008/CRP.1).

B. Participation in the work of the Committee

16. As in previous years, the Committee reconfirmed that all United Nations Member States and observers wishing to participate in the work of the Committee as observers were welcome to do so. In accordance with established practice, Palestine participated in the work of the Committee as an observer, attended all of its meetings and made observations and proposals for consideration by the Committee and its Bureau.

17. In 2008, the Committee again welcomed as observers all States and organizations that had participated in its work in the preceding year.[3]

[3] The observers at the Committee meetings were: Algeria, Bangladesh, Bulgaria, China, Ecuador, Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Kuwait, Lebanon, the Libyan Arab Jamahiriya, Mauritania, Morocco, the Niger, Qatar, Sri Lanka, the Syrian Arab Republic, the United Arab Emirates, Venezuela (Bolivarian Republic of), Viet Nam and Yemen, as well as the African Union, the League of Arab States, the Organization of the Islamic Conference and Palestine.

Chapter IV
Review of the situation relating to the question of Palestine

18. In pursuance of its mandate, the Committee continued to monitor the situation in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including East Jerusalem, as well as relevant political developments. The Committee called to mind that 60 years had passed since the Nakba, when hundreds of thousands of Palestinians were forced to leave their homes and property following the Arab-Israeli hostilities of 1948. By the time armistice agreements were signed in 1949, Israeli forces had taken control of large parts of British Mandate Palestine, areas that became the new State of Israel. The Committee recalled that the conflict had resulted in the expulsion and mass flight of some 800,000 Palestine refugees, who left behind their homes, land and property. Today, the original Palestine refugees and their descendants are estimated to number more than 7 million persons and constitute the world's oldest and largest refugee population. The Committee maintained that the just resolution of the issue of Palestine refugees on the basis of General Assembly resolution 194 (III) of 1948 was central to a lasting solution of the question of Palestine, along with the other permanent status issues of Jerusalem, settlements, borders, water and security. Overall, the situation in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including East Jerusalem, remained of great concern. Despite the continuation of the political process and the efforts of the parties to overcome their differences and move ahead towards the achievement of a peaceful settlement of the conflict, minimal progress has been made.

19. Late in 2007, international efforts for a resumption of the peace process intensified. Encouraged by the Quartet, a number of regional meetings were held, culminating in the international conference held at Annapolis on 27 November under the auspices of the United States of America. The conference resulted in a joint understanding between the Palestinian and Israeli sides, committing them to relaunching the permanent status negotiations, resolving all outstanding issues, making every effort to conclude an agreement before the end of 2008 and implementing their respective obligations under the road map. Members of the League of Arab States underlined their continued support for the Arab Peace Initiative (A/56/1026-S/2002/932, annex II, resolution 14/221) and their belief in the need to achieve comprehensive peace in the region. Following the Annapolis conference, on 12 December, Israeli-Palestinian negotiations formally began, with a meeting of the joint steering committee headed by the Minister for Foreign Affairs of Israel, Tzipi Livni, and the Palestinian Chief Negotiator, Ahmed Qureia. The Prime Minister of Israel, Ehud Olmert, and the President of the Palestinian Authority, Mahmoud Abbas, held meetings frequently, starting on 27 December 2007. In 2008, the leaders met on 8 and 27 January, 7 and 13 April, 5 May, 2 June, 13 July, 6 and 31 August and 16 September.

20. The Annapolis conference, followed by the International donors' conference for the Palestinian State, held in Paris on 17 December, co-chaired by France, Norway, the European Union and Quartet representative Tony Blair, provided important impetus to the peace process. The Secretary-General, 68 States and international institutions participated in the Paris conference, which was aimed at securing financial support for the Palestinian Authority. Donors commended the Palestinian Reform and Development Plan presented by Palestinian Prime Minister Salam Fayyad, and pledged $7.4 billion in assistance. The Quartet met members of

the League of Arab States on the margins of the conference. Subsequent Quartet meetings at the principals' level were held on 2 May (London) and 24 June (Berlin), expressing concern about the situation on the ground, including the continued closure of the Gaza Strip and continued Israeli settlement construction in the West Bank, and calling for implementation of the road map and continuation and intensification of negotiations between the two sides aimed at resolving all permanent status issues.

21. In the meantime, the situation on the ground remained a cause of great concern. The Israel Defense Forces (IDF) continued to conduct deadly military incursions into the Gaza Strip, targeting militants responsible for rocket attacks. On 15 January, IDF entered the Gaza Strip and engaged Hamas militants in a heavy battle, which included air and tank operations. Forty-two Palestinians, including civilians, were killed, and 117 were injured by IDF as a result of 8 ground incursions, 15 air strikes and the firing of 10 surface-to-surface missiles over a period of one week.

22. In February and March, there was another major escalation in violence, with heavy Israeli air and land assaults on the Gaza Strip. The IDF operation "Hot Winter", launched on 29 February, lasted for five days. The Bureau of the Committee issued a statement on 29 February (see para. 63 below). On 1 March, 59 Palestinians were killed, including 39 civilians, among them women and children. During the same five-day period, over 390 rockets and mortar rounds were fired at Israel. The Security Council held an emergency meeting on 1 March (see para. 57 below). The Secretary-General condemned the excessive and disproportionate use of force and the killing of civilians. He also condemned indiscriminate rocket fire and called for an immediate cessation of such rocket attacks. Violence also spread to Jerusalem and the West Bank. On 16 April, 12 Palestinian civilians, including children and a news cameraman, were killed in Israeli action against militants following the killing of three Israeli soldiers.

23. Attacks by Palestinian militants also continued, and included a suicide attack in Dimona on 4 February, which killed one Israeli, and a shooting at a Jewish seminary in West Jerusalem, in which eight Israeli students were killed. An attack on 9 April on the Nahal Oz fuel depot killed two Israeli civilians. On 19 April, an attack using armoured vehicles and explosives against the Kerem Shalom crossing injured 13 soldiers. On 22 May, a suicide bombing attack caused significant structural damage to the Beit Hanoun (Erez) crossing. The blast also damaged electricity lines between the Gaza Strip and Israel. Three Israeli civilians were killed on 2 July, when a Palestinian used a bulldozer to attack vehicles in West Jerusalem. In a similar incident on 22 July, at least 16 people were injured.

24. The Committee denounced the excessive and indiscriminate use of force by Israel, the occupying Power, against the Palestinian civilian population in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including East Jerusalem. The Committee strongly condemned extrajudicial killings, the destruction of Palestinian homes, civilian infrastructure and agricultural lands and the attendant devastating effects on the Palestinian population. At the same time, it strongly condemned all attacks against Israeli civilians and infrastructure. As of March, it was estimated that, since the start of the second intifada in 2000, nearly 5,500 Palestinians had been killed and some 32,600 wounded by Israeli forces. By June, at least 994 Palestinian children under

the age of 18 had died as a result of the violence. The number of Israelis killed during the same period was 1,130.

25. Complying with road map phase I obligations, the Palestinian Authority deployed 300 security forces in Nablus in November 2007, leading to a significant improvement in the security environment in the area. On 3 May 2008, some 480 security officers were deployed in Jenin. However, citing security concerns, IDF continued operations in the West Bank. Such actions were regarded as seriously undermining the Palestinian Authority's security efforts. Improved security performance would be sustainable only through intensified Israeli-Palestinian cooperation. The Berlin Conference in Support of Palestinian Civil Security and the Rule of Law, held on 24 June, focused on strengthening the Palestinian police and justice sectors.

26. On 19 June, an Egyptian-mediated ceasefire was declared, bringing about some improvement in the security situation in the Gaza Strip and southern Israel. However, Israel did not extend the ceasefire to the West Bank, as repeatedly called for by the Palestinian Authority, and continued to carry out military operations and arrest campaigns. An IDF raid into Nablus on 24 June, launched without any prior contact with Palestinian security forces in the area, killed two Palestinians. IDF also closed down and seized equipment belonging to alleged Hamas-affiliated institutions, including schools, medical centres, media outlets and civil society organizations. Thirty-six civil society organizations were outlawed in the city.

27. Despite its claim that it was removing physical obstructions to ease movement, Israel continued to impose sweeping restrictions on Palestinian movement in the West Bank. An increasing number of obstacles to movement and access and continued construction of the wall and settlement expansion served to worsen the humanitarian situation. In August, 608 closure obstacles were erected by Israel in the West Bank.

28. There has been a marked increase in Palestinian home demolitions by Israel in 2008. There were 138 demolitions in the West Bank between January and March, compared with 29 in the last three months of 2007. Some 400 Palestinians were displaced as a result. A significant portion of the demolition orders issued in the past two years related to structures in Bedouin villages in the Jordan Valley, including Al-Hadidiya, Al-Farsiya, Al-Jiftlik and Al-'Aqabah. Home demolitions have also continued in occupied East Jerusalem. In addition, in January alone, Israeli forces uprooted 3,200 trees and destroyed water cisterns and stone terraces/retaining walls in fields near Beit Ula, north-west of Hebron.

29. In the Gaza Strip, the continuing blockade imposed by Israel in response to the election of Hamas in 2006 and its de facto takeover in June 2007 continued to inflict a severe toll on the 1.5 million residents. The suffocating closure of border crossings continued to obstruct the movement of persons and goods into and out of the area, a collective punishment of the entire Palestinian civilian population there. Farmers have been crippled by continued border closures, which did not allow produce to reach markets. The agricultural sector has suffered owing to repeated incursions, which have destroyed orchards and fields, and as the Israeli authorities prevented the planting of anything over 40 cm high, farmers were limited to growing cash crops such as strawberries and potatoes. Driven by need and diminishing supplies, up to half of the population of the Gaza Strip poured across the border into Egypt on 23 January, reflecting the desperation felt by Gazans, who had been effectively

isolated for more than eight months. By January, imports into the Gaza Strip had dropped by 77 per cent, and exports from Gaza by 98 per cent. On 18 January, Israel imposed a comprehensive closure of the Gaza Strip, halting the import of fuel, food and medical and relief items. Some 40 per cent of the population of Gaza did not have regular access to running water. Gaza hospitals at times experienced power cuts for between 8 and 12 hours a day, hampering critical procedures. Hospitals were running on generators, limiting their activities to intensive care units only. Most Palestinians could not exit Gaza. By 8 August, at least 233 Palestinian patients had died after permission to exit Gaza for medical treatment had been denied or delayed. While the number of trucks entering through the Sufa and Al-Muntar (Karni) crossings increased by 54 per cent during the four weeks following the Egyptian-mediated ceasefire between Israel and Hamas agreed on 19 June, the import level stood at approximately 30 per cent of the level before June 2007, bringing little relief to Gazans.

30. Egypt continued its efforts aimed at defusing tensions between Fatah and Hamas, particularly in the Gaza Strip, and at facilitating the gradual reopening of crossings in coordination with the parties. On 5 June, President Abbas called for a national dialogue to implement the Yemen initiative on Palestinian national reconciliation, which called for a resumption of dialogue in line with the Mecca Agreement and for the return of the situation in the Gaza Strip to that existing before June 2007 (S/2008/201, annex). The Secretary-General stated that unity among Palestinians was very important and expressed the hope that the parties concerned would resolve all issues through dialogue in a peaceful manner.

31. The PLO Negotiations Affairs Department estimated that, as of August, almost 11,000 Palestinians were being held in Israeli prisons or detention camps, including 2,700 Palestinians arrested in 2008, most of them from the West Bank. Some 9,000 were identified as political prisoners, including 326 minors and 94 women. Some 49 Palestinian Legislative Council members have been detained for two years under administrative detention without charge or trial. About 85 per cent of the detainees, in particular children, had been subjected to abuse, beating and humiliation before and during questioning. It was also estimated that, since 1967, Israel had detained and imprisoned almost 700,000 Palestinians, constituting one fifth of the entire Palestinian population of the Occupied Palestinian Territory. On 3 December 2007, Israel released 429 prisoners, followed by the release of 198 prisoners on 25 August. Both releases were described as "goodwill gestures".

32. In contravention of the advisory opinion of the International Court of Justice, Israel continued the illegal construction of the separation wall on Palestinian land in deviation from the armistice lines of 1949. As of May, 409 km of the wall, or 57 per cent of the planned route, had been built. Another 66 km (9 per cent) were under construction, and the construction of 248 km (34 per cent) had not yet begun. Upon completion of the wall, 11.9 per cent of the West Bank, including East Jerusalem, would lie west of the wall or be surrounded completely or partially by it. Those areas are home to 498,000 Palestinians (222,500 in East Jerusalem), living in 92 towns and villages. The wall would de facto annex 60 settlements (including 12 in East Jerusalem) in which 381,000 Israelis live. In July, the defence establishment agreed to dismantle a 2.4 km stretch of the separation wall north of Qalqilya. The move would return 2,600 dunums of agricultural land to its Palestinian owners. The dismantled stretch would be replaced by 4.9 km of fencing closer to the Green Line, as ordered by the Israeli High Court of Justice. In August, the Israeli Government

decided to re-route a section of the wall near the biggest West Bank settlement of "Ma'ale Adumim", which would allow about 4,000 dunums of Palestinian land to remain on the eastern side of the wall.

33. In the period under review, Israel continued settlement activity in the West Bank, particularly in and around East Jerusalem. As of July 2008, there were approximately 4,000 settlement units under construction in the West Bank and East Jerusalem. Construction commenced on 275 new buildings in 53 settlements; 81 per cent were located in areas of the Occupied Palestinian Territory now west of the separation wall. It was estimated that 40 per cent of the West Bank was taken up by Israeli infrastructure — settlements, roads and military bases — which was largely off-limits to Palestinians. The rest of the land has been broken up into enclaves, which are separated from each other and controlled by checkpoints and roadblocks. On 15 October 2007, Jerusalem's committee on planning and construction voted in favour of permitting settlers to reside in a five-storey building located in the middle of the East Jerusalem neighbourhood of Silwan, despite the fact that it had been built without a permit. The building had been slated for evacuation.

34. On 4 December 2007, the Israeli Construction and Housing Ministry published tenders for the construction of 307 housing units in the East Jerusalem settlement of "Har Homa" (Jabal Abu Ghneim), home to approximately 4,000 settlers. Also in "Har Homa", plans to construct more than 1,000 housing units on "absentee land" belonging to Palestinians were approved by the Jerusalem municipal planning board on 7 January. Tenders for 120 more homes were approved for "Har Homa" on 30 May, and in July, the construction of 1,800 new housing units was approved for "Har Homa" and "Pisgat Ze'ev".

35. On 1 January 2008, tenders for 440 units in East Jerusalem's "East Talpiot" settlement were announced by the Israel Land Administration. On 7 January, the construction of 60 housing units in the East Jerusalem settlement of Ras al-Amud commenced. Prime Minister Olmert approved the construction of 750 homes in the West Bank settlement of "Givat Ze'ev" on 8 March 2008. Approximately 50 units were approved in the "Gilo" settlement following the Annapolis conference. On 31 March, the Jerusalem municipality announced plans to build 600 new houses in the "Pisgat Ze'ev" settlement in East Jerusalem. More Palestinian property was confiscated to build a light rail system connecting the settlements in occupied East Jerusalem with West Jerusalem, further isolating East Jerusalem from the rest of the West Bank. In all, 9,617 new housing units have been built in East Jerusalem in the short period following the Annapolis conference.

36. On 8 April, the Israeli Vice Premier, Haim Ramon, reportedly confirmed that the "Ofra" settlement had been built on privately owned Palestinian land. On 18 April, the Construction and Housing Ministry invited construction firms to bid for the rights to build 48 houses in the "Ariel" settlement and a further 52 houses in the "Elkana" settlement. On 30 April, Israeli police began operating in a new police station located in the so-called E1 area near the "Ma'ale Adumim" settlement.

37. On 9 May, the Israeli Interior Ministry established a new municipality in the West Bank that included the "Ariel" bloc settlements of "Elkana", "Etz Efraim", "Oranit" and "Sha'arei Tikva", with a total population of more than 13,200 settlers. This measure removed the four settlements from their traditional authorities, paving the way for their further development and expansion.

38. On 21 May, the Construction and Housing Ministry announced a plan to build 286 new houses in the "Beitar Ilit" settlement near Bethlehem. On 14 July, the Israeli Ministry of Industry, Trade and Labour approved the expansion of the industrial park in the "Ariel" settlement, allowing for the construction of 27 factories and tripling the size of the settlement's industrial park.

39. On 13 June, the Israeli Interior Ministry confirmed plans to build 1,300 additional apartments in the "Ramat Shlomo" settlement in East Jerusalem. On 19 June, in Al-Mazra'a Al-Qabaliya, north-west of Ramallah, Israeli military bulldozers razed about 500 dunums of land, which are slated to be used for settler agricultural projects and for a new settlement. On 24 July, the Foreign Affairs and Defence Committee of the Knesset approved the construction of 20 new housing units at "Maskiyot", establishing a new settlement in the Jordan Rift Valley in the West Bank.

40. According to reports available to the Committee, the Israeli Government was responsible for much of the increase in settlement construction. According to some accounts, the number of Government tenders for building in the settlements in the first half of 2008 increased by 550 per cent.

41. More than 480,000 Israeli settlers reside in settlements in the West Bank, including more than 200,000 who live in occupied East Jerusalem. There are approximately 440 settlements, outposts, military bases and other occupation sites, including 144 settlements, 96 outposts inside settlement boundaries, 48 military bases and other sites in the Occupied Palestinian Territory. While Palestinians constitute over 50 per cent of the population of East Jerusalem, only 7.3 per cent of its land is available for Palestinian construction.

42. Settler violence, harassment and intimidation of Palestinian civilians have also continued. On 31 March, settlers in Hebron sealed with glue the entrances to six stores belonging to Palestinians. They also sealed off the entrance to the office of the Islamic Waqf at the Tomb of the Patriarchs. On 24 July, more than 20 settlers attacked the Palestinian village of Burin near Nablus, smashing cars and windows and cutting electrical wires. Israeli security officials on 18 August raised concerns about an increase in violence by settlers in the West Bank. On 13 September, armed settlers from "Yitzhar" fired at the residents of a Palestinian village, vandalizing property and agricultural land.

43. Israeli restrictions on the Palestinians continued to be the main cause of the economic downturn, with gross domestic product (GDP) increasingly driven by Government spending and donor aid. Limited resources were available for investment, further reducing the productive base for a self-sustaining economy. Real GDP was negative in the first half of 2007, but began to recover in the West Bank during the second half of the year. As a result of the situation in the Gaza Strip, however, real GDP growth in 2007 was estimated to be zero. During the reporting period, the socio-economic situation of residents in the Gaza Strip took a turn for the worse. Some 80 per cent of families were reliant on humanitarian aid, compared with 63 per cent in 2006, and unemployment was approaching 50 per cent. In 2006, some 3,900 factories employed 35,000 people, but by December 2007, there were just 195 factories left, employing 1,700. Construction projects estimated at $240 million came to a halt, resulting in 42,000 workers being laid off. The number of households earning less than $1.20 per person per day rose from 55 per cent to 70 per cent. As a result of border crossing closures, estimated lost income from

strawberry sales alone during the 2007-2008 season was approximately $7 million. The reduction in fuel supplies began on 28 October 2007. In February, gasoline (diesel) supply dropped by approximately 67 per cent and benzine by about 80 per cent.

44. In the course of the year, in order to advance economic development, the Palestinian Authority finalized its 2008-2010 Reform and Development Plan and began implementing nearly 200 development projects, worth $250 million. A further 226 projects were approved by the Government. On 13 May, Quartet representative Tony Blair announced a package of measures to stimulate economic development. Implementation advanced, with selected obstacles to movement being removed and a telecommunications contract being signed between Israel and the Palestinian Authority. However, progress in relaxing movement and access of persons and goods remained slow. The 2005 Agreement on Movement and Access has yet to be implemented. While the fiscal performance of the Palestinian Authority has improved somewhat, there was a budget shortfall of $400 million for the period from October through the end of 2008, which means that salaries might not be paid for that period, unless donors fulfil outstanding pledges and direct assistance to budget support.

45. The isolation of the Gaza Strip has had the most dramatic impact on women and, in particular, children, who account for more than 56 per cent of the population. Restricted access to food, water and medicine seriously affected newborn babies and pregnant mothers. Many babies were born suffering from anaemia inherited from their mothers. Of every 1,000 born, 28 die from malnutrition, anaemia and other poverty-related diseases. In 2002, 19 per cent of Gazans suffered from anaemia. In 2008, the figure was 77.5 per cent. Children received on average only 61 per cent of their daily calorie requirement from United Nations supplies. There were approximately 25,000 deaf and hearing-impaired people, many of whom had no specialist support service. About 2,000 children dropped out of school. Electricity cuts disrupted teaching, shortening the school day. There was a nearly 80 per cent failure rate among students in grades four to nine, with the rate increasing to 90 per cent in mathematics.

46. Throughout the occupation, problems compounding the water crisis have included Israel's discriminatory policy in distributing joint water resources in the West Bank and the limits it placed on the ability of the Palestinian Authority to drill new wells. The crisis has worsened in 2008 because of a serious drought. West Bank per capita water use was about 66 litres a day, two thirds of the minimum of 100 litres recommended by the World Health Organization in order to ensure that all health concerns were met. Per capita water consumption by the settlers in the West Bank was 3.5 times that of Palestinians, or more than 200 litres per day. In the Gaza Strip, over-extraction from the coastal aquifer has led to seawater intrusion, and groundwater resources have been heavily contaminated. The blockade imposed on the Gaza Strip since January 2006 has pushed the water and sanitation sectors to the brink of collapse due to lack of investment. Some communities had access to only 14 litres of water per capita daily. Because of the lack of fuel, the Gaza Power Generating Company has had to cut the power supply, leaving Gaza's 1.5 million people with daily power cuts of up to eight hours, reducing access to drinking water.

47. The humanitarian situation of the 1.5 million people in the Gaza Strip has become increasingly grave, making the work of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) even more

critical. Gazans were caught between the Israeli closure, which amounted to collective punishment, and repeated militant attacks. The low levels of fuel delivery had an impact on all sectors of life, forcing UNRWA, for the first time, to suspend food distribution to 650,000 people.

48. In order to save fuel, UNRWA gave priority to food distribution, solid-waste removal and sewerage projects. Doctors, nurses, teachers and social workers were obliged to walk to work. Between 30 and 50 per cent of ambulances could not be used owing to the shortage of fuel and spare parts. Another consequence was the daily dumping of approximately 55,000 litres of raw and partially treated sewage into the Mediterranean Sea. In June 2008, new procedures applied to the movement of United Nations agencies in the West Bank, including property searches and refusal to accept United Nations identification documents, caused increasing operational concerns and difficulties among staff on the ground.

49. According to a survey conducted by the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, the World Food Programme and UNRWA in May 2008, soaring food prices, falling incomes and growing unemployment had brought Palestinian purchasing power to an all-time low, jeopardizing the livelihoods of Palestinians and leading to heavy debt and changes in family eating habits. Rising food and fuel prices, coupled with the closure regime imposed upon the Gaza Strip, meant that aid agencies found it increasingly expensive to deliver aid to the West Bank and the Gaza Strip. The consequences of the stepped-up violence in and around the Gaza Strip had dire consequences for civilians. Since January, 68 Palestinian children have been killed in the Gaza Strip, including UNRWA schoolchildren.

50. UNRWA implemented an emergency appeal to help approximately 170,000 refugee families cope with additional economic hardship. Owing to funding shortfalls, the Agency was able to provide only a fraction of the relief required to meet the ever-increasing needs.

51. The Programme of Assistance to the Palestinian People of the United Nations Development Programme launched its midterm strategic framework 2008-2011, reinforcing its commitment to supporting socio-economic development in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, exploring new approaches and drawing on its corporate capacities and strategic partnerships. Priorities included poverty reduction and democratic governance. The document itself was the outcome of cooperation and coordination between UNDP and the Palestinian Authority. Since the establishment of the Palestinian Authority in 1994, the Programme of Assistance to the Palestinian People, in partnership with public and private institutions, civil society and donors has invested more than $700 million in support of the Palestinian people.

52. The Committee also continued to express appreciation for the work of the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs in the Occupied Palestinian Territory. It noted that the scope of the consolidated appeal for 2008 focused on delivering humanitarian assistance, increased protection of civilians, enhanced monitoring and reporting on the humanitarian situation and the strengthening of United Nations humanitarian coordination structures.

Chapter V
Action taken by the Committee

A. Action taken in accordance with General Assembly resolution 62/80

53. In pursuance of its mandate, the Committee continued to mobilize the international community in support of the Palestinian people, in cooperation with United Nations bodies, Governments, intergovernmental and civil society organizations and others, as indicated below.

54. On 20 June 2008, to mark the 60 years of dispossession of Palestine refugees, the Committee held a special meeting at United Nations Headquarters.

1. Action taken in the Security Council

Meetings of the Security Council

55. During the period under review, the Security Council continued to monitor the situation on the ground and the efforts to implement the road map. It held monthly briefings throughout the year under the agenda item entitled "The situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question".

56. The Council held its 5824th meeting on 22 January 2008, at the request of the Chairman of the Arab Group (S/2008/31). Twenty-eight speakers took the floor during an open debate (S/PV.5824 and Resumption 1).

57. The Council held its 5847th meeting on 1 March 2008, at the request of the Libyan Arab Jamahiriya (S/2008/142), to consider the deteriorating situation in the Occupied Palestinian Territory due to continuing Israeli military attacks on the civilian population (S/PV.5847).

58. An open debate following a monthly briefing was held on 22 July 2008, at which the Chairman of the Committee, Paul Badji, made a statement (S/PV.5940 Resumption 1).

59. The Council held its 5983rd meeting on 26 September 2008, at the request of Saudi Arabia, to consider Israeli settlement activities in the occupied Palestinian territories (S/2008/615). A total of 18 speakers, including 10 Ministers for Foreign Affairs, took the floor during the debate (S/PV.5983).

2. Action taken by the Bureau of the Committee

60. On 20 November 2007, the Committee issued a statement on the occasion of the fortieth anniversary of the adoption by the Security Council of resolution 242 (1967) (GA/PAL/1067).

61. On 30 November 2007, the Bureau of the Committee issued a statement on the Annapolis conference (GA/PAL/1070).

62. On 4 February 2008, the Bureau of the Committee issued a statement on the deteriorating situation in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including East Jerusalem (GA/PAL/1071).

63. On 29 February, the Bureau of the Committee issued a statement on the escalation of violence in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, especially in the Gaza Strip, and the killing of innocent civilians (GA/PAL/1080).

64. On 4 March 2008, the Chairman of the Committee, Paul Badji, met with the Under-Secretary-General for Political Affairs and discussed the latest political developments and the Committee's programme of activities.

B. Action taken by the Committee and the Division for Palestinian Rights in accordance with General Assembly resolutions 62/80 and 62/81

1. Programme of international meetings and conferences

65. Through its programme of international meetings and conferences, the Committee continued to raise international awareness of the various aspects of the question of Palestine and international support for the rights of the Palestinian people and the peaceful settlement of the question of Palestine.

66. In the period under review, the following international events were held under the auspices of the Committee:

(a) United Nations Seminar on Assistance to the Palestinian People, Amman, 19 and 20 February 2008;

(b) United Nations International Conference on Palestine Refugees, headquarters of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, Paris, 29 and 30 April 2008;

(c) United Nations International Meeting on the Question of Palestine, Qawra, Malta, 3 and 4 June 2008.

67. All of the above events were attended by representatives of Governments, Palestine, intergovernmental organizations and United Nations system entities, as well as representatives of civil society and the media. The reports of the meetings were issued as publications of the Division for Palestinian Rights and were made available through the United Nations Information System on the Question of Palestine (UNISPAL) and the Division's website.

68. In Amman, during the United Nations Seminar on Assistance to the Palestinian People, the Committee delegation was received by the Prime Minister of Jordan, Nader Dahabi. The Committee delegation also visited the Palestine refugee camps of Husn and Irbid, in northern Jordan, where UNRWA provides social services to the refugees. While in Paris in connection with the United Nations International Conference on Palestine Refugees, the Committee delegation held meetings at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of France with the Directors of the United Nations and Middle East Departments. In Malta, during the United Nations Meeting on the Question of Palestine, the Committee delegation was received by the President of Malta, Edward Fenech-Adami, at the presidential palace, and by the Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Foreign Affairs of Malta, Tonio Borg, at the Foreign Ministry. Following its visit to Malta, the Committee delegation was received in Vatican City by the Secretary for Relations with States of the Holy See, Archbishop Dominique Mamberti.

2. Cooperation with intergovernmental organizations

69. Throughout the year, the Committee continued its cooperation with the African Union, the Non-Aligned Movement and the Organization of the Islamic Conference.

70. The Committee also continued its cooperation on the question of Palestine with States members of the European Union. During the meeting at the French Foreign Ministry, the Bureau discussed issues of mutual interest in the light of the assumption by France of the presidency of the European Union. Those consultations were continued at a meeting on 10 September 2008 with the Permanent Representative of France to the United Nations in his capacity as representative of the presidency of the European Union.

3. Cooperation with civil society

Civil society organizations

71. The Committee continued its cooperation with civil society organizations worldwide. Representatives of civil society participated in all meetings organized under the auspices of the Committee, including the observance of the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People on 29 November 2007. The meetings provided civil society representatives with an opportunity to discuss the situation on the ground and their programmes in support of the Palestinian people and to improve coordination of their activities. Numerous representatives of civil society organizations also attended the special meeting of the Committee held on 20 June 2008 to mark 60 years of dispossession of Palestine refugees, including expert speakers who shared with the Committee their analyses of the status of Palestine refugees. The Committee was appreciative of the work done by civil society organizations, encouraging them to continue contributing to efforts aimed at achieving a just and lasting peace between Israelis and Palestinians.

72. The Committee maintained and developed its liaison with national, regional and international coordinating mechanisms cooperating with it, in addition to its established liaison with a large number of individual organizations. Over the past year, the Chairman of the Committee met with representatives of civil society organizations in New York and at the meetings organized under the auspices of the Committee away from Headquarters.

73. The Division for Palestinian Rights maintained the Internet website "Civil society network on the Question of Palestine" (http://www.un.org/depts/dpa/ngo) as a tool for the exchange of information and for cooperation between civil society and the Committee. At the request of the Committee, the Division also continued to issue its bimonthly newsletter, NGO Action News, covering the activities of civil society on the various aspects of the question of Palestine.

Parliaments and inter-parliamentary organizations

74. The Committee continued to develop its liaison with national and regional parliaments and their organizations and invited a number of parliamentarians to speak at its meetings. In connection with the international meetings, the delegation of the Committee held meetings in Paris with deputies of the National Assembly and the Senate, as well as with members and officials of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Mediterranean, headquartered in Saint Julians, Malta.

4. Research, monitoring and publications

75. The Division carried out research and monitoring activities and responded to requests for information and briefings on the question of Palestine. Under the guidance of the Committee, which reiterated the relevance of the research, monitoring and publications programme, it also prepared the publications listed below for dissemination, including through UNISPAL:

(a) Monthly bulletin on action taken by United Nations and intergovernmental organizations relevant to the question of Palestine;

(b) Monthly chronology of events relating to the question of Palestine, based on media reports and other sources;

(c) Reports of international meetings and conferences organized under the auspices of the Committee;

(d) Special bulletins and information notes on the observance of the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People;

(e) Periodic reviews of developments related to the Middle East peace process;

(f) Annual compilation of resolutions and decisions of the General Assembly and the Security Council relating to the question of Palestine.

5. United Nations Information System on the Question of Palestine

76. The Division for Palestinian Rights, in cooperation with relevant technical and library services of the United Nations Secretariat, continued to administer, maintain, expand and develop UNISPAL and the "Question of Palestine" website, which is located on the United Nations home page under "Peace and Security", pursuant to successive annual General Assembly mandates. This included the ongoing maintenance and upgrading of the technical components of the system to ensure the uninterrupted presence of UNISPAL on the Internet and involved the expansion of the document collection to include relevant new and old documents. In addition, steps continued to be taken to enhance the user-friendliness and usefulness of the system (http://unispal.un.org), including by incorporating additional multimedia content and a streamlined search facility. The Division undertook a redesign of the UNISPAL and "Question of Palestine" websites, which is nearing completion, and conducted an online survey of website users to assess ways in which the system could be further improved.

6. Training programme for staff of the Palestinian Authority

77. Two staff members from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Palestinian Authority participated in a training programme conducted by the Division from September to December 2007, in conjunction with the sixty-second session of the General Assembly. The trainees familiarized themselves with various aspects of the work of the Secretariat and other organs and conducted research on specific topics.

7. International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People

78. The International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People was observed at Headquarters and at the United Nations Offices at Geneva and Vienna on

29 November 2007. On the occasion of the observance at Headquarters, in addition to a special meeting of the Committee and other activities, a cultural exhibit entitled "Palestine: A Continuing Legacy" and a musical performance by Simon Shaheen and Qantara were organized by the Permanent Observer Mission of Palestine to the United Nations under the auspices of the Committee. The Committee noted with appreciation that the International Day of Solidarity had also been observed in many cities throughout the world. Details on the observance are contained in the special bulletin issued by the Division.

79. In adopting its programme of work, the Committee decided that a similar observance of the International Day of Solidarity should be organized in 2008.

Chapter VI

Action taken by the Department of Public Information in accordance with General Assembly resolution 62/82

80. The Department of Public Information, pursuant to General Assembly resolution 62/82, continued to implement its special information programme on the question of Palestine. The objective of the programme is to raise international awareness on this question and on the situation in the Middle East with a view to contributing effectively to an atmosphere conducive to dialogue and supportive of the peace process.

81. The Department covered intergovernmental meetings and related press briefings using all media at its disposal. The Department produced a total of 130 press releases, providing summaries in English and French of formal meetings and briefings, and distributed live television coverage to broadcasters around the world through United Nations Television. Television coverage was also posted on the Internet (webcast) for easy viewing. UNifeed produced and distributed 11 packages on the question of Palestine, including the United Nations response to developments on the ground, relief work and support for refugees, as well as activities of the Security Council and the Human Rights Council.

82. The United Nations Radio Arabic Language Unit reported on meetings organized by the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People.

83. The United Nations News Centre, a news portal of the United Nations website, regularly highlighted stories related to the question of Palestine in the six official languages. In addition, a special focus page on the Middle East provided an in-depth and user-friendly venue for accessing information on the issue.

84. The Department organized a training programme for five young Palestinian journalists at Headquarters, in Washington, D.C., and in Geneva from 5 November to 14 December 2007. The programme was aimed at strengthening the skills of the participants as broadcast media professionals and providing them with basic technical skills to maintain websites in Arabic.

85. The Department updated and displayed the permanent exhibit of the question of Palestine at Headquarters, in English, and at the United Nations Office at Geneva, in French. It also produced an updated edition of the booklet *The Question of Palestine and the United Nations* in English and in other official languages.

86. The network of United Nations information centres, services and offices continued to disseminate information on the question of Palestine and to organize relevant activities. A major focus of activities was the promotion of the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People on 29 November 2007. The Secretary-General's message for the Day was widely disseminated in official and non-official languages.

87. Information centres/services in Accra, Ankara, Asunción, Beirut, Brussels, Cairo, Dar es Salaam, Jakarta, Mexico City, Moscow, New Delhi, Prague, Pretoria, Rabat, Rio de Janeiro, Tokyo, Vienna and Washington, D.C., commemorated the Day by organizing events individually or jointly with Governments, regional organizations, civil society and the media.

88. During the period under review, some centres provided media-related assistance, including the organization of press conferences, to the Commissioner-General of UNRWA during her visits to their duty stations. They also placed opinion pieces (op-eds) by the Commissioner-General and the Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator in newspapers. Some information centres translated and disseminated the statement of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict on the violence in Gaza.

89. In its *UN Chronicle* magazine, the Department featured full coverage of the sixty-second session of the General Assembly and the Fourth Committee (Special Political and Decolonization Committee), including the reports of UNRWA and the Special Committee to Investigate Israeli Practices Affecting the Human Rights of the Palestinian People and Other Arabs of the Occupied Territories. It also published articles which covered issues related to the question of Palestine, including "Gaza border closures accompanied by fears of humanitarian crisis" and "Financing for development to reach the MDGs: the experience in the Arab region".

90. *The United Nations Today*, the successor volume to *Basic Facts About the United Nations*, included a thorough review of United Nations action in the Middle East, including participation in the ongoing peace process, humanitarian assistance to Palestine refugees and advocacy for the needs of the Palestinian people and support for their human rights.

91. The Dag Hammarskjöld Library continued to digitize relevant documents for the UNISPAL document collection.

Chapter VII
Conclusions and recommendations of the Committee

92. **The year 2008 marked 60 years of Palestinian dispossession, or the Nakbe, as the Palestinians refer to the loss of their homeland. Hundreds of thousands of Palestinians were forced to leave their homes and properties as a result of the Arab-Israeli hostilities of 1948. At its special meeting to mark that event, the Committee reiterated the permanent responsibility of the United Nations towards the question of Palestine until it is resolved in all its aspects in accordance with international law and urged the international community to continue its support for the Middle East peace process.**

93. **The Committee was encouraged by the new level of engagement by major stakeholders from all regions that led to the Annapolis conference and Paris donors' conference resulting in a resumption of permanent status negotiations between Israel and the Palestinians and an outstanding degree of support for the Palestinian Authority and its economic reform programme. The Committee structured its activities throughout the year so as to support a climate conducive to the advancement of permanent status negotiations between the parties aimed at the achievement of the two-State solution and the realization of the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people. The Committee stressed the need for a complete cessation of all acts of violence, including military attacks, destruction and acts of terror. It called upon Israel, the occupying Power, to end its illegal policies and oppressive practices in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including East Jerusalem, such as settlement activities, the construction of the wall and numerous measures of collective punishment. It emphasized the importance for both sides of implementing their road map obligations. The Committee welcomed the resumption of the negotiations between the parties, including at the highest level. It has repeatedly stressed that the political momentum provided by the Annapolis and Paris conferences must not be lost, and supported all efforts towards the goal of achieving a final status agreement by the end of 2008.**

94. **Regrettably, the Israeli-Palestinian negotiations were not supported by tangible improvements in the situation on the ground. The occupying Power continued to change the reality of life in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including East Jerusalem, through the expansion of settlements and related infrastructure, including the wall, and the fragmentation of the Occupied Palestinian Territory using checkpoints and other obstacles. This led to the stagnation of the political process and continued deterioration of Palestinian socio-economic conditions, further undermining efforts by the Palestinian Authority and the international community to bring about a two-State solution. The Committee is of the view that the illegal Israeli occupation of the Palestinian Territory must end without conditions, which should allow the Palestinian people to establish an independent State on all territories occupied in 1967, including East Jerusalem, and to exercise their inalienable rights, including the right to self-determination. The Committee firmly supports the two-State solution in accordance with Security Council resolutions 242 (1967), 338 (1973), 1397 (2002) and 1515 (2003). The Committee is convinced that only serious and sustained international engagement will bring about a peaceful and negotiated settlement of all outstanding issues and reverse the growing support**

for radical forces that promote violent and unilateral approaches to ending the conflict. Any diplomatic process needs to be buttressed by urgent and meaningful steps on the ground. The continued support of the international community is crucial for advancing the process, namely, a consistent dialogue between the Quartet and the parties and the inclusion of regional partners. The Arab Peace Initiative remains a crucial element for advancing peace in the region. States members of the European Union are encouraged to take a more proactive role in international efforts to resolve the conflict. The Committee welcomes the unwavering and substantial budgetary support for the Palestinian Authority provided by the European Union and other major donors. At the same time, it calls upon all donors to live up to their pledges and ensure the continued functioning of the Palestinian Authority institutions.

95. It is also imperative that the parties live up to their road map obligations. In particular, the Committee calls upon Israel to end its military operations in the Occupied Palestinian Territory and to stop any other measures that further undermine Palestinian institutions. The Committee is strongly opposed to the illegal construction and expansion of settlements in the West Bank, as well as the unlawful construction of the wall, and finds these activities incompatible with negotiations on the permanent settlement. It again reminds Israel, the occupying Power, that it is bound by the Geneva Convention relative to the Protection of Civilian Persons in Time of War, which, inter alia, obliges parties to the Convention to protect civilians during hostilities. Israel must release, immediately and unconditionally, all Palestinian prisoners, including imprisoned Cabinet members and parliamentarians. The Committee strongly condemns the killing of innocent civilians by either side. It denounces rocket attacks on Israel and calls for the cessation of these activities by Palestinian armed groups. The Committee has welcomed the agreed upon ceasefire in Gaza and has demanded its extension to the West Bank. The ceasefire and the political process can be sustained only once Israel has stopped and reversed all illegal actions in the Palestinian Territory occupied since 1967.

96. The Committee calls upon the Palestinian leadership, the leaders of all factions and all Palestinians to unite in support of President Abbas, his Government and all democratically elected Palestinian institutions and to resolve their political differences by peaceful means. The Committee calls for a comprehensive national dialogue supported by confidence-building measures to start a process of regaining national unity and the reunification of Gaza and the West Bank under the Palestinian Authority. It is paramount that the various Palestinian factions put the national interests and aspirations of the Palestinian people ahead of any partisan concerns. The Committee firmly believes that the unity of the Palestinian people is an essential condition for achieving a viable solution of the question of Palestine.

97. The Committee is convinced that its own work and the programme of mandated activities of the Division for Palestinian Rights represent a significant contribution by the United Nations and its membership to the search for a comprehensive, just and lasting peaceful solution of the question of Palestine, in accordance with international law and relevant United Nations resolutions. It will continue to generate heightened international awareness of the various aspects of the question of Palestine, international support for the rights of the Palestinian people and the peaceful settlement of the question of

Palestine. In this connection, the Committee emphasizes the useful and constructive contribution of the Division in support of its mandate aimed at enabling the Palestinian people to exercise their inalienable rights. It notes with satisfaction: (a) the level of dialogue, engagement and support of the international community for its programme objectives, for instance, in terms of both participation at the meetings convened and the use of printed and electronic information materials provided by the Division; (b) the continued involvement of civil society organizations in support of the efforts of the Committee and the United Nations towards a comprehensive, just and lasting settlement of the question of Palestine; and (c) the increased international awareness of United Nations policies and activities on the question of Palestine as indicated by the growing number of documents and relevant information materials on the issue accessed by users worldwide at the websites maintained by the Division. The Committee also considers that the annual training programme for staff of the Palestinian Authority has proved its usefulness and requests that it be continued.

98. **The Committee considers that its programme of international meetings and conferences contributes to focusing the attention of Governments, intergovernmental and civil society organizations and the general public on the need for advancing a peaceful settlement of the conflict and mobilizing much-needed assistance to the Palestinian people. The Committee, through its Bureau, will regularly assess the outcomes of the international meetings and conferences and, where required, decide on steps to enhance their contribution to the mandated goals of the Committee. In its meetings programme for 2009, the Committee intends to address issues such as the importance of the continuation of the political dialogue between the parties aimed at achieving a permanent settlement of the question of Palestine; the significance of realizing a tangible improvement in the situation in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including East Jerusalem; and the urgent need for all stakeholders to remain engaged in all aspects of the question of Palestine, to monitor and assess the developments and to use the available mechanisms, such as the main organs of the United Nations, to actively influence the process. The Committee will also highlight the adverse consequences of the settlement policy and the construction of the wall for the achievement of a two-State solution; the collective international responsibility to protect the Palestinian people; and the need to alleviate humanitarian and socio-economic hardships, including the plight of Palestinian women and children, with particular focus on the urgent need to improve the situation in Gaza.**

99. **The Committee commends civil society organizations for their efforts to uphold international legitimacy with regard to the question of Palestine through advocacy and the mobilization of public opinion and for their initiatives aimed at alleviating the plight of the Palestinian people. It has welcomed the efforts made by organizations worldwide to mark 60 years of Palestinian dispossession, raising public awareness of this long-standing and tragic issue. The Committee appreciates the support it receives from the Secretariat in strengthening cooperation with civil society. The Committee encourages civil society organizations to broaden their base, involving trade unions and other large organizations, and to focus and harmonize their advocacy efforts at the local, national, regional and international levels. The**

Committee looks forward to further developing its cooperation with parliamentarians and their umbrella organizations. The Committee is of the opinion that the experience and political influence of lawmakers can be instrumental in consolidating the democratic process and institution-building in the territory under the Palestinian Authority, strengthening political dialogue between the parties, and in applying norms of international law to efforts to resolve the conflict.

100. **The Committee requests the Division to continue its substantive and secretariat support; the programme of research, monitoring and publications and other informational activities, such as the further expansion and development of UNISPAL, including the graphic enhancement of the "Question of Palestine" website; the annual training programme for staff of the Palestinian Authority; and the annual observance of the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People.**

101. **The Committee is of the view that the special information programme on the question of Palestine of the Department of Public Information has made an important contribution to informing the media and public opinion of the relevant issues. The Committee requests the continuation of the programme, with the necessary flexibility, as warranted by developments relevant to the question of Palestine.**

102. **Wishing to make its contribution to the achievement of a comprehensive, just and lasting settlement of the question of Palestine, and in view of the many difficulties facing the Palestinian people and besetting the peace process, the Committee calls upon all States to join it in this endeavour and to extend their cooperation and support to the Committee, and invites the General Assembly again to recognize the importance of its role and to reconfirm its mandate.**

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